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AN
AFFECTIONATE PLEADING
FOR
ENGLAND'S
OPPRESSED FEMALE WORKERS:

RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED TO

MY QUEEN;

("The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."—*Prov. xxix.*, 14;)

THE GOVERNMENT;

(Governors are sent by God "for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."—*1 Pet. ii.*, 14;)

THE ARISTOCRACY, THE CLERGY, AND THE
CONSUMING CLASSES IN GENERAL.

I say not to the Public, for the Public is an ill-favoured phantom which is made accountable for all sort of iniquity. I have often been told the Public will not be satisfied unless we do this: thus men commit all manner of enormity for fear of this phantasm—the Public. Seek to please God, and you will have the praise of all good men; and what is better, His blessing upon all your proceedings.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them."—*Matt. vii.*, 12.

"They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field."—*Lam. Jer. iv.*, 9.

"Want is the sickness which kills most surely, and kills in the most cruel manner—slowly and hopelessly."

"Thou shalt not kill."—*Ex. xx.*, 13.

"All the slaughter committed by oppressions, on any pretence whatever, is wilful, cruel murder."—*Commentary by Scott.*

"Masters, give unto your servants (not the lowest price you can get your work done for but) that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."—*Col. iv.*, 1.

"And I will come near to you to judgment; I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts."—*Mal. iii.*, 5.

LONDON:

W. CLOWES AND SONS, 14, CHARING CROSS.

1850.

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BRITANNIA'S THANKSGIVING DAY DREAM.

(*From PUNCH.*)

An awful Plague went through the land : it thinn'd the close-pent town,
Swept the scant hamlet, crossed the stream, and clomb the breezy down ;
Unseen it breathed, till poison seethed in the sweet summer air ;
Before its face was terror, upon its track despair.

For three sad months BRITANNIA mourned her children night and day,
For three sad months she strove in vain the pestilence to stay :
Medicine, helpless, groped and guessed, and tried all arts to save,
But the dead carried with them their secret to the grave.

Sudden the dark hand ceased to smite : BRITANNIA drew free breath,
As passed away the shadow of the minister of Death :
And upon all her children a solemn charge she laid,
That high and low should bow them down, because the plague was staid.

Then in the night that followed on that thanksgiving day,
BRITANNIA saw a vision, as on her bed she lay :
Of a great region stretched about, a crowded careful land,
Wherein men plied all labours, of head, and heart, and hand.

In it a city, high o'er which a golden temple shone,
Wherein the great god Mammon was sitting on a throne,
While millions round about his feet, men, women, old and young,
Offering their hearts in homage, with various tone and tongue.

Ill matched that city's dwellings ; low hovel, palace high ;
Saloons with stately pageants, huts where wretches slunk to die ;
Well-ordered streets, with tracts hard by wherein the labouring breath
Inhaled the subtle poison that makes life a lingering death.

There for aught save Mammon-worship there were few hearts to care,
For aught but Mammon-service there were but few hands to spare ;
Still the pale slaves grew paler, the task-masters more stern,
Few there of wise had time to love, of ignorant to learn.

Death sat at the gaunt weaver's side, the while he plied the loom ;
Death turn'd the wasting grinder's wheel, as he earn'd his bread and doom ;
Death, by the wan shirtmaker, plied the fingers to the bone ;
Death rocked the infant's cradle, and with opium hushed its moan.

Nor in the City only did the Spectre hold his place ;
In the village and the hamlet, too, he showed his constant face :
In the foul sty where sire and son, mother and maiden slept,
Where the infant round its playground, the dunghill, crowed and crept.

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At bed and board, in cup and can, in worktime and in play,
 In the street as in the dwelling, in the night as in the day,
 Sat Death in Life, a presence that none did seem to note,
 Until the grim Guest sudden rose and bared his arm and smote.

Then was weeping in the hovel, and wailing in the hall,
 And over all the land was fear, stretched like a funeral pall;
 And even Mammon's vot'ries paused in their absorbing prayer,
 And looked up from their worship, with a daunted, doubting air.

And turning in their trouble unto their God and Lord,
 They saw Death sit on Mammon's throne—'twas Death that they adored.
 His bare jaws set in scornful smile, the Sceptre from his shroud
 Stretched forth his fleshless arm across the pale and palsied crowd.

"Your day of thanks," it said, "is come, your day of thanks is o'er;
 Millions to-day have prayed their prayer, that never prayed before.
 What reck I of your thankfulness, ye fools, or of your prayer?
 One plague hath passed from out your homes, how many still are there?"

"What can one day of prayer avail, if from the church ye go
 To your homes unswept, ungarnished, to your world of wealth and wo?
 Pray as you will, my stronghold's still in every ditch and drain;
 Though now my servants hide their heads, they will come forth again.

"Why shrink from Death, ye that build up his seat in every home?
 How be thankful at his going, ye that ever bid him come?
 What wonder he makes revel, when still ye spread his board?
 Need he be chary of his plagues when still ye feed his hoard?"

"I am a giant. Would ye learn to nip me in my growth?
 Bring light of Heaven and rain of Heaven to those that pine for both;
 Build homes for toil, where toil may live in decency and health;
 Let ignorance and want have tithe of knowledge and of wealth.

"Show that the bond of brotherhood that linketh man with man
 Will no less bind, though never forged, since first the world began;
 Unless that sinful selfishness, that ye so sore have rued,
 And strive to find in common grief the seeds of common good."

THE

OPPRESSED FEMALE WORKERS.

IF after having, in the providence of God, been called upon to preside over the meeting of the Female Slopworkers of the Metropolis, (such a meeting as the annals of the whole world do not furnish the like,) independent of the personal knowledge I have before had of their cruelly oppressed state, I should cease my endeavours to obtain protection for them, and after a “gush of pity,” to quote Mr. Sidney Herbert’s Letter, leave them to “the same dreary monotony of starvation,”—should I not be like Richard Hooper and James Morrish, referred to in the following extracts from *The Times* and *Morning Chronicle* journals? and might not these journals hold me up to the scorn and loathing of my fellow-men? But I trust that not the fear of man, but the love of Christ, constraineth me to exert, seeking God’s blessing, my feeble powers of remonstrance with their oppressors, and to persuade that a better course should be pursued towards them, and that the Government of the country should do their duty in affording them protection. In doing this, am I not also the friend of their oppressors? for although the laws of England, as *now administered*, may not touch them, must they not all one day give an account of their iniquity, and be answerable for the life-blood of their poor sisters at the judgment-seat of Christ. And, finally, I beseech all to whom these details may come, to consider well if they have any part in causing the cruel oppression of their poor neighbours, as detailed in the following pages, and in the letters generally of the Special Correspondents of the *Morning Chronicle*.

The Times of the 2nd February, 1850, commenting upon the death of the poor girl Mary Ann Parsons, obtained as a servant from the Bideford Union Poor-house, said :—

“ We will leave the two monsters concerned in the death of this poor creature to the judgment of their country. But there are two persons who cannot be reached by the law, who appeared as witnesses to testify to various acts of brutality which they had seen perpetrated upon the girl, but who yet never moved a finger to save her, nor attempted to procure her redress. We trust the opinion of their neighbourhood will do justice on *Richard Hooper*, of Buckland Brewer, and *James Morrish*, a shoemaker, the persons in question.”

From the “ Morning Chronicle,” February 5, 1850.

“ We cannot leave the narrative without an indignant comment on the evidence of two witnesses of this transaction. One—a man of the name of *Hooper*—spoke of various acts of brutality which he himself had witnessed, which ought instantly to have made him apply to the magistrates for their protection towards this unfortunate child. When he first saw her she was strong and well ; in a few weeks she was bleeding, unable to stand upright, bruised, and lacerated. According to his own statement, he had seen her mistress flog her with a hazel-rod ; he had seen her master flog her with a furze stub, described as a strong stick about a foot long, furnished with eighteen stout sharp leather thongs about two feet in length—and he had not, apparently, raised his voice in common mercy for her then, nor had his heart been stirred by a man’s instinct of protection for her afterwards. His indifference, and *Sermon’s* code of correctional discipline, are alike shameful and disgusting ; and the fact that such a being as the latter should have found his way to a public office of responsibility and power,—power over the destitute, the forlorn, the friendless, and the helpless, is a foul stain on our social system itself. The law may be unable to touch these men ; but the shuddering soul of humanity loathes and casts them forth.”

The cruel treatment and consequent death of the poor girl referred to above, the non-interfering witnesses of which,

though the law be unable to reach them, it is stated the shuddering soul of humanity loathes and casts forth, was no worse or so cruel as many of those suffering under the cruel oppression of what the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle* has called the Shylocks of the labour market ; and surely the men, whether Noblemen, or Physicians to the Queen, or whoever they be, who encourage these Shylocks, are more guilty than the mere idle spectators of the cruel chastisement inflicted on the poor girl Mary Ann Parsons.

THE FEMALE SLOPWORKERS OF THE METROPOLIS.

A meeting of poor Female Slopworkers was held on Monday evening, December 3rd, in the British School Room, Shakspeare Walk, Shadwell, which had been kindly lent by the proprietor of the building. From 1,000 to 1,200 of these unfortunate creatures were present, some clad in the habiliments of respectable poverty, but by far the greater part necessarily appeared in clothing to which the word “ rags ” was literally applicable in its fullest meaning.

The meeting was called for seven o'clock, but the greater portion of the females had assembled soon after six, and about the same hour Lord Ashley and the Right Hon. Sidney Herbert entered the room. We regret that, on account of our having had no knowledge of the intention of these distinguished persons to attend—the meeting being a private one, convened for purposes connected with our own investigations into the condition of the labouring classes—our reporters were not present in time to hear their observations. We understand that they spoke to the following effect:—

LORD ASHLEY said he deeply sympathised with the persons assembled, and not only he, but several of his friends, and he had done so for many years past. He had given much attention to their deplorable condition, and he had come to the conclusion that the only remedy for their distress was emigration. In the various Colonies it was found that there was a very large proportion of males over females ; and it was very curious that throughout England and Wales there was the same excess of females over males. On Friday evening last, before he had heard anything about this meeting, he

had received a letter from an eminent lady, asking—Can nothing be done to help the poor needlewomen to emigrate? She added, that she had lately sent out a few poor young women to Australia, and she had since received a letter from one of them, saying, that immediately on getting over she had obtained a situation at a salary of £20 a year; and further, it appeared, that by conducting herself with becoming propriety, this young woman had been honorably married, and was now doing remarkably well. He did think that the Colonies opened a wide door for the distressed needlewomen, and he would urge them to turn their attention to the question, and they might rest assured that nothing should be wanting on his part to further their views. But as his Right Honorable friend (Mr. Sidney Herbert) was anxious to say a few words—and they would be very few, for they had a previous engagement to meet with the lady who had sent him this letter, and a party of other friends, to see whether anything could be done to organise a plan for the emigration of the young needlewomen—they would excuse him from saying more than they had his deepest sympathies, and that every plan for their benefit should have his warmest support.

MR. SIDNEY HERBERT then addressed a few words to the meeting. He could assure them of the deep sympathy that he had long cherished for the poor, and especially for the poor needlewomen, whose sufferings, as they had been detailed in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle*, he deeply felt. But he would not intrude further upon their time, as he was aware that this meeting was one entirely of a practical character, and he was very anxious that they should proceed at once to detail their own sufferings and wrongs, which he was sure would tend to deepen the impression that had been created by the pathetic details of the Metropolitan Correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*, who had awakened a spirit in the country which he trusted would not be laid asleep till it had issued in the amelioration of the condition of the class of needlewomen now assembled.

Lord Ashley and Mr. Sidney Herbert, who were loudly cheered in the course and at the conclusion of their remarks, then withdrew.

MR. SHAW, army clothier, was then called upon to take the chair; and on taking it he addressed the poor creatures in the following words:—My poor friends, in asking you to meet here this evening, it has not been from any mere motives of curiosity, but, I trust, on

the part of those who have proposed and of all taking part with us in this meeting, there exists an earnest determination, with God's help, to seek to obtain an amelioration of your oppressed condition ; to enable us to do which, we require to obtain a faithful and true account of your actual condition, consequent upon the low payment you receive for your labour. As an humble individual, who has for some years not only mourned over the grievous, cruel oppression of so many of my poor fellow-subjects, by the starving prices paid for female labour especially, but also used my best endeavours to obtain the alleviation of it, and having in consequence made many enquiries into their condition, I have been requested to preside here. It has been with earnest prayer that God may direct me, and that he may be present with us this evening by His Holy Spirit for Christ our dear Redeemer's sake, who, when on this earth, went about doing good ; and who has given his disciples this commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us. And surely, for such a purpose as we are met together this evening, we may expect His presence amongst us ; and may His blessing rest with those who have come forward on your behalf, and that of the oppressed working people throughout the country, and may they have wisdom for all their further enquiries, and for their guidance in seeking a remedy for this grievous national evil.

The object of the meeting being to ascertain the earnings of the female hands engaged in the slop-trade ; to hear some account of their sufferings and privations through the low prices paid for their labour ; also to discover whether those low prices arise from competition among the masters, or competition among the men ; before the business proceedings commenced, they were earnestly exhorted to be careful in speaking nothing but the exact truth in any statements they might make, and in any answers they might give to questions put to them.

It has been stated that the meeting consisted of from 1,000 to 1,200 slopworkers. The aggregation of so considerable a number rendered it obviously impossible for their condition to be described individually ; it was therefore determined to ascertain it generally by means of questions put by one person—with parties stationed at different points in the room to ascertain the nature of the replies with precision and accuracy.

The first class of questions related to the occupations of the parties

and their numbers. It appeared that there were present 344 shirt makers, 341 trowsers makers, 178 coat or blouse makers, 34 waist-coat makers, 19 makers of sou'-westers, 33 makers of waterproof coats, 23 stay makers, 24 umbrella and parasol makers, 83 makers of soldiers' pillows and beds, and 66 shoe binders.

The next series of questions had reference to their condition, or, more correctly, to the amount of their physical comforts and necessities. The first question of this class was, "How many have under-clothing?"—The mode in which this interrogation was received, shewed that it was thoroughly understood. Three or four, we could not say which, but certainly not more, held up their hands in token of their possession of such requisites to female comfort and decency. The next question was, "How many have not a complete dress?"—Nearly the whole meeting immediately signified their destitute condition in this respect; and it further appeared that 508 had borrowed some article or other of clothing, in order to appear at the meeting. In further illustration of their condition it was ascertained that of those present 169 had been compelled to pledge their work in order to obtain necessities; and that 297 worked for "sweaters," parties whose calling has been amply explained in the Letters upon the condition of the Metropolitan Poor. "How much," it was next asked, "do the sweaters obtain from you out of every shilling?"—The instant replies, from hundreds of voices, were "twopence" and "fourpence," which being repeated, a female of considerable intelligence called out that the deduction averaged "threepence." Adverting to household comforts, it was ascertained, in the next place, that only 58 were in the possession of blankets; that 151 had no beds to lie on; that 45 had been compelled to pawn their beds to save themselves from starvation; and that the large proportion of 180 had been reduced to the necessity of selling their beds altogether. With respect to parochial assistance, it appeared that in the last week 464 had asked for it, and that 236 had obtained temporary relief. In 259 cases either temporary or permanent assistance had been denied; and it was stated that slopwork is taken in at the workhouses of Bermondsey, Rotherhithe, Whitechapel, and Shoreditch.

Another class of questions had reference to the treatment of the slopworkers by their masters or employers. It appeared that all, or most of them, were expected to be at the shop for work at a certain

hour ; but that they had sometimes to wait for it for different periods, varying from one hour to half a day. Three hundred and seventeen females indicated that they had been ill from being wet, and having taken cold when thus waiting ; 73 had had work thrown upon their hands for having “ slimmed ” it ; 127 had been compelled to pay for buttons or parts of garments which they had never received ; and 20 declared they had been obliged to pay a penny apiece for buttons not worth a farthing. With reference to wages, 135 had been kept out of their earnings for one day, 148 for a week, and 75 had submitted to fines for having taken in their work “ too late.”

It was next ascertained that 232 had been obliged by poverty to leave their rooms or lodgings, unable to pay the rent. A great proportion of those present were married, but among them were 294 widows. Of those married 70 had one child, 90 had two, 79 three, 60 four, 39 five, 33 six, and 34 above six ; and, shouted a pale-faced elderly woman, “ I’ve got ten.”

There were 61 widows with one child, 52 with two children, 46 with three, 37 with four, 12 with five, 19 with six, and 13 with more than six children. There were 24 of these widows whose husbands had died of cholera, 39 who had been compelled to ask the parish to bury their husbands, 32 mothers (married women or widows) who had lost children by cholera, and 28 out of the 32 had been compelled to have their children buried at the expense of the parish.

Only 23 of the females present admitted that they lived with men in an unmarried state, because they were unable to support themselves. That there were more who were withheld by shame from confessing their condition may be fairly inferred from the fact, that on the question being put, how many would marry these men if they had the means?—26 hands were held up. Thirteen of these unmarried women had children.

On the question being put—when bills appeared in the shop windows, advertising “ 500 hands wanted,” or “ 1,000 hands wanted”—whether, when they applied for the work thus offered, the masters advanced the prices?—there was a unanimous cry of “ No, no, they lower them ! ”

On the question being asked—how many had earned 8s. last week?—not a hand was held up throughout the whole assembly. 7s. was next tried, but with a like result : five had earned, 6s.,

28 had earned 5*s.*, 12 had earned 4*s.* 6*d.*, 142 had earned 3*s.*, 150 had earned 2*s.* 6*d.*, 71 had earned 2*s.*, 82 had earned 1*s.* 6*d.*, 98 had earned only 1*s.*, and of this last class 88 stated they were entirely dependent upon their own exertions for support; 92 females had earned under 1*s.*, and 223 had had no work at all during the whole of the week.

It was then stated that a woman in the meeting had had five waistcoats which she had made returned upon her hands for defective work; and it was asked whether any other waistcoat maker would come forward and examine them. A young woman stepped forward, and after examining one of the waistcoats, the material of which was of striped silk, pointed out that the stripe of the pattern where the pocket was cut did not exactly correspond with those on the other part of the waistcoat; at the same time adding, that the cloth was often so unevenly cut that it was impossible for the best workwoman to make the patterns correspond. The woman who made the waistcoats said she was paid 9*d.* a piece for them, and found trimmings besides. For the same waistcoat the Chairman declared the ordinary price in the trade would be 6*s.* On being asked how long it would take to make such a waistcoat as the one produced, the woman who had examined it said it could not be done in less than seven hours. She thought she could do it in that time. She called herself a good hand, but not one of the best in the trade.

The following statement was read to the meeting:—"Honored gentlemen—I am an orphan girl, having worked for the last eight years at the slop-work, and have not been able to get more than the small amount of 3*d.* or 4*d.* for garments—namely, trowsers, waistcoats; shirts, 1½*d.*; and during that time have not been able to earn more than 4*s.* a week, and out of that had to find thread to the amount of 8*d.*, which would thus leave me—work, 4*s.*; twist, thread, and silk, 8*d.*; total, 3*s.* 4*d.*; to enable me to keep myself, after paying lodging, &c., 2*s.* 4*d.* to subsist upon, being without any parents to assist me. Having made six waistcoats, and after making them at 4*d.* each, when taken home they were thrown (on account of pressing) upon my hands, for which I had to pay the employer 15*s.*, besides giving me in charge to a policeman."

Another woman here came upon the platform, bringing with her the frame of a sou'-wester, stitched through and across in all directions, which had been returned upon her hands because the

master said it was not sewn thick enough. For making these sou'-westers she said she received $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ each, and could not make more than two in a day, working from five o'clock in the morning till ten or eleven at night. Out of this scanty pittance she had to find thread, which she was obliged to buy at her employer's shop, and sometimes he gave her whitey-brown thread and black work; she was therefore obliged to buy black thread besides, and pay for both. Last Saturday night, being detained herself, she sent her work to the shop, when her master sent her back a pound of thread, for which he charged $2s.$, *and no work*.

Another woman stated that her husband had had only one month's work since last Christmas-eve, and that was seven months ago. He had repeatedly applied for work, but being subject to fits he could find no employment. He had, however, a pension of $7d.$ a day, which helped to pay the rent. She had six children entirely depending upon her, with the exception of the pension. She worked at shirt-making, for which she received $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ and $2d.$ for full-breasted ones, finding thread, which cost her $3d.$ a week. Her earnings ran from $2s.$ to $2s. 8d.$; she did not remember that she had ever earned $3s.$

Another woman stated that she had worked at slop-work for ten years. About two years ago she had a fever, contracted by a cold which she caught from insufficient clothes, and the consequence was that one of her arms was crippled, which sadly interfered with her work. She got $7d.$ for making a jacket—coats were from $10d.$ to $1s.$, and in all cases she had to find thread and twist. She could not finish one coat in a day. Her husband, who is a cripple, and sells oysters at the corner of a street, only earned $1s. 9d.$ last week.

Another woman stated that her husband died of cholera five months ago, and that she had been left a widow with four children; two of them were entirely dependent upon her earnings. She worked at shirt-making as a second hand, and her earnings were never more than $2s. 6d.$ a week, often only $1s. 6d.$ She received $1\frac{1}{4}d.$ and $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ a piece for the shirts; and the best were $2d.$, and in all cases she had to pay for the thread.

Another, an Irishwoman, said her husband died in July last, leaving her a widow with three children. She and two of her sisters worked at sack-making, and the week before last the three of them

earned 4s. 6d. She had been obliged to pledge her bedstead and sheets for the means of subsistence, and had nothing now to lie on but some shavings. She had fallen behind in her rent too, and had, in consequence, been "noticed out" by her landlord. Except 1s. 6d. and three loaves she received from the parish for her children, she had nothing to look to in the world.

A young Englishwoman, apparently in speedy prospect of becoming a mother, who resides in Palmer's Folly, said her husband had not earned a farthing for the last two months, and that being a labourer, there was little hope of his obtaining any work until spring. They had been married several years, and had four children, not one of whom had shoes to wear. They were unable to buy any, as all they had coming in was what little she could earn by making duck and canvas trowsers. Last week she had been compelled to pledge nine pair, and she feared her employer would come upon her surety, unless she could redeem them. Hitherto she had never troubled the parish, but this week would try them hard.

Several other females came forward, ready to state their several tales of distress, but the time did not permit.

The last question put to them was, whether, in their opinion, the masters pulled one another down, or whether the women went to the masters and pulled down the prices? Nineteen-twentieths of the women present laid the blame on the masters, but there were a few who said that there were women who went to the masters and proposed to work at a halfpenny less than the then existing prices.

It was now near ten o'clock, and as the meeting had been assembled for nearly four hours, it was thought desirable to bring the proceedings to a close. A very hearty vote of thanks was given to the Chairman, after which the meeting retired in the greatest order.

In the course of extensive personal enquiries made during the proceedings, it was ascertained from their own lips that 811 persons had pledged property, at their own valuation, to the amount of £791. 8s., being in round numbers at the rate of £1 per head. The average earnings of the same number of persons was by the same means ascertained to be 2s. 10½d. per week. It may fairly be inferred that the remaining 400 persons had pledged property to an equal amount. Hence we may conclude that the whole of the slopworkers present at the meeting had goods in pledge to the

amount of £1,200, for which they were paying £300 per annum interest, and this by a body of people whose average earnings were only 2s. 10½d. per week.

The following is taken from the Letter of the Special Correspondent of the Metropolitan Districts in the *Morning Chronicle* of November 23rd, 1849 ;—

* * * * From the above it will be seen that, after paying their rent, all these two workwomen had left to purchase food and clothing was, throughout the year 1846, *fourpence farthing* each per day; throughout the year 1847, *threepence halfpenny*; throughout the year 1848, *twopence halfpenny*; and throughout the present year, *twopence halfpenny also*. To get this amount each, it should be remembered that they had to work from eighteen to twenty hours every day, including Sundays. In every year, they told me, there are generally seven months, and at the very least six, that they cannot pay rent, and during the other six months they have to work night and day in order to clear off the back rent. They can't go into a better lodging, because they can't get credit for the winter months. The room is taken furnished. It is a small attic, seven feet square, without any fire-place, and several panes are gone from the windows. There is scarcely any furniture: only one chair. The other party has to sit on the bed. They pay 2s. 6d. a week. The first winter they came the landlady insisted on having her rent every week, and that winter they were three months and never had a bit of bread, not a crumb, to eat. They used to live on oatmeal altogether. Frequently they had a pennyworth between them for the whole day. After the first year the landlady, having had experience of their honesty, allowed them to go on credit during the winter. In fact, they were obliged to allow their rent to go 12s. 6d. in arrear the first winter of all. But they paid it directly they had work, and since then the landlady never troubles them during the winter for the rent—never, indeed, asks for it. She is satisfied that they will pay it directly they can. They are convinced that no one else would do the same thing, for their landlady is very kind to them, and allows them the occasional use of her fire. They never go in debt for anything but their rent. If they haven't got money they go without—never run credit for anything to eat. If they

have anything to pledge, they get their food that way ; and if they are quite “ up,” and have nothing to pledge, “ why then,” said one of the poor old creatures, smiling to me, “ we starve : yes, we’re obliged to it. We’d rather do that than go in debt. We should always be thinking about it. I’m sure, last winter the rent we owed was always in my head. When I went to bed and when I got up, I was afraid we should never rub it off.” One of the parties is an old maiden woman, and the other a widow. The one is 43 years, and the widow 54. They have been working together seven years. The widow was in better circumstances. Her husband was a farmer in Yorkshire, and her father was a very large farmer in the same county. The maiden woman was formerly in service ; now she is afflicted with the lumbago, and is able only to work at her needle. To-day she is washing, and she will be ill for two or three days afterwards. The two of them have for thirty hours been without food. Always during winter they are very badly off—they have scarcely any food at all ; their principal nourishment at that time is oatmeal. They have frequently pawned everything they had that the pawnbrokers would lend *anything* upon.

In the summer they get as many things as they can out of pawn again, and they sit up night and day toiling to pay their winter’s rent score. They say that those who get their living by needlework must, they are convinced, do the same as they do ; they are satisfied there are thousands in London who starve, get into debt, and pledge regularly every winter, and they slave night and day in the summer to pay their debts and redeem their clothes again. *This is the industrious needlewoman’s regular life.* They can say so of their own knowledge. They have heard numbers say so. This summer they have paid off as much as £7 of back rent, and in order to do this they have worked regularly for six months eighteen and twenty hours a day, Sunday and week-day. They have often sat, the two of them, and worked from daylight at three o’clock in the morning. They have got up at two to do their own little domestic work, so that they began work *immediately it was daylight*, and they have worked on, frequently with only one cup of tea, through the whole day, till eleven at night. They never burn a candle but when they have work to do—they can’t afford it ; and they never have a fire, even in the depth of winter. And after all this toil, suffering, and privation, their reward is twopence-halfpenny a day.

I now come to the second test that was adopted in order to verify my conclusions. This was the convening of such a number of needlewomen and slopworkers as would enable me to arrive at a correct *average* as to the earnings of the class. I was particularly anxious to do this, not only with regard to the more respectable portion of the operatives, but also with reference to those who, I had been given to understand, resorted to prostitution in order to eke out their subsistence. I consulted a friend who is well acquainted with the habits and feelings of the slopworkers, as to the possibility of gathering together a number of women who would be willing to state that they had been forced to take to the streets on account of the low prices for their work. He told me he was afraid, from the shame of their mode of life becoming known, it would be almost impossible to collect together a *number* of females who would be ready to say as much *publicly*. However, it was decided that at least the experiment should be made, and that everything should be done to assure the parties of the strict privacy of the assembly. It was arranged that the gentleman and myself should be the only male persons visible on the occasion, and that the place of meeting should be as dimly lighted as possible, so that they could scarcely see or be seen by one another or by us. Cards of admission were issued and distributed as privately as possible, and to my friend's astonishment, as many as twenty-five came, on the evening named, to the appointed place—intent upon making known the sorrows and sufferings that had driven them to fly to the streets, in order to get the bread which the wretched prices paid for their labour would not permit them to obtain. Never in all history was such a sight seen or such tales heard. There, in the dim haze of the large bare room in which they met, sat women and girls, some with babies suckling at their breasts—others in rags—and even these borrowed, in order that they might come and tell their misery to the world. I have witnessed many a scene of sorrow lately; I have heard stories that have unmanned me; but never till last Wednesday had I heard or seen anything so solemn, so terrible, as this. If ever eloquence was listened to, it was in the outpourings of those poor lone mothers' hearts for their base-born little ones, as each told her woes and struggles, and published her shame amid the convulsive sobs of the others—nay, of all present. Behind a screen, removed from sight, so as not to wound the modesty of the women—who were never-

theless aware of their presence, sat two reporters from this Journal to take down *verbatim*, the confessions and declarations of those assembled, and to them I am indebted for the following report of the statements made at the meeting.

A gentleman who has for many years taken a deep interest in the subject, and myself, severally addressed those present, and urged them to speak without fear, and to tell the whole truth with regard to their situations, assuring them that their names should not be divulged, and, at the same time reminding them that the only way to obtain their deliverance from their present condition was, that they should speak for themselves, tell their own tale, simply, and without exaggeration, with the most scrupulous regard to truth.

Thus admonished, the following statements were made by the parties.

The first speaker was a middle-aged woman, who stood up and said :—"I am a slopworker, and sometimes make about 3s. 6d. a week, and sometimes less. I have been drove to prostitution sometimes, not always, through the bad prices. For the sake of my lodgings and a bit of bread, I've been obligated to do what I am very sorry to do, and look upon with disgust. I can't live by what I get by work. The woman who employs me, and several more besides, gets 11d. and 1s. a pair for the trowsers we make, and we get only 4d. or 5d. We can't do more than a pair a day, and sometimes a pair and a half. It's starving. I can't get a cup of tea and a bit of bread. I was married, and am left a widow, and have been forced to live in this distressed manner for the last four years. I've been to several different people to get work, but they are all alike in taking advantage of our unfortunate situation."

Scarcely had this one sat down than another, who worked in the same house and under the same piece-mistress, rose, and spoke as follows :—"I works, Sir, the goods of another person for a living. I've been married fifteen years. My husband has been dead these twelve years. I thought one place would suit me better than another, but I find them all one way ; they're all much alike. The most I can earn is about 3s. 6d. a week. I get my lodging only from the person that employs me. I'm sometimes obliged to work till twelve at night for my 3s. 6d. ; and now in these short days I can scarcely earn anything. I've been obliged often to go to prostitution. These twelve years I haven't been altogether on the

streets, but have been almost as bad. I can scarcely earn, Sir, what I eat. I think the small number of us present arises from the shame of the women to come. But I express the truth, and nothing but the truth; and yet people are ashamed even to tell the truth. But I'm not ashamed to tell the troubles I've had through distress. Bad payment for the work obliges us to do wrong. It's against our will to do such a thing. And now for a woman of my years it's getting almost more than I can bear, Sir."

The third speaker was one with scarcely any clothing upon her back. She said:—"I'm a slopworker, and have got a little boy eighteen months old, and I'm not able to do much work. I work with another woman, and get 7*d.* and 6*d.* a pair for doing trowsers. I'm often out of work, and the last fortnight or three weeks I've had nothing to do. I've got no husband, but am compelled to live with a man to support me, for the sake of my child. The father of the child is a labouring man in the docks. He helps to support the child when he can, but he is sometimes employed only two or three days in the week, and at other times not that. He hasn't left me. He gets 2*s.* 4*d.* a day when he has work. He has work to-day, and last Friday was the first he had for a fortnight. He applies daily at the docks, and can't get it; but when they're busy he gets his turn. I can state solemnly in the presence of my Maker, that I live with him only to get a living and save myself from doing worse. But if I could get a living otherwise, I can't say I would leave him. At my own work I sometimes make 2*s.*, and at others only 1*s.* 6*d.* a week. He's willing to marry me the first day that he can afford; but he hasn't the money to pay the fees. Sometimes he is a fortnight or three weeks, and even a month without any work at all, and last week we were forced to go to the Refuge for the Destitute.

The next was a good-looking girl. Her father had driven her from home, and she could not live by shoe-binding. She said:—"Five years ago my father turned me out of doors. The shoe-binding is so low that I wasn't able to pay 1*s.* a week for my lodging, and that caused me to turn out into the street. Then it was three weeks before I ever was in a bed. I sat on London-bridge a fortnight before Christmas five years ago. My father took me home again three years ago, but he turned me out again, and I was forced to go back to the street. He says he can't keep us at home. He is a soap-boiler. My mother died about twelve years

ago. There were nine of us when she died, and we're all living still. My father said he could not keep us any longer. I work whenever I can get it at trowsers work ; but can't get it always. I used to get it first-hand till lately ; but latterly I've worked for a woman who takes it in. I do a pair a day, and sometimes more. I sometimes used to make 1*s.* 6*d.*, and at others 2*s.* a week ; and when I have the best employment I can generally earn about half-a-crown."

After this, another young girl rose up. She, like the last, had been turned into the streets by her parent. All she wished (she told us) was to gain admittance into some asylum for penitent females:—"I've been out in the streets three years. I work at the boot-binding, but can't get a living at it. I went with Mr. —, and another gentleman who took me home to my father, but my father couldn't help me. If I get bread, Sir, by my work, I can't get clothes. For the sake of clothes or food I'm obliged to go into the streets, and I'm out regularly now, and I've no other dependence at all but the streets. If I could only get an honest living, I would gladly leave the streets. But I can't earn enough at my work to get a living, and therefore I know it's useless returning to it. I've been out a whole fortnight together, and not got a meal but what I got in the streets ; and I've been forced several times to go into St. George's workhouse. When there I'm only five minutes' walk from my father's house, but he won't receive me. I don't know why. [A gentleman present at the meeting here said that he had gone to see the girl's father, to induce him to receive his daughter. He had to go half a dozen times before he could see him, and then he did not find him at home, but in a beer-shop, half drunk. He refused to take his daughter back, and on being told that if he persisted she must go into the streets, he replied 'I don't care: let her do as she pleases?' The girl continued:] If I could get work that would keep me, I would give up the streets entirely."

The next speaker made the following statement:—"I am a shirt maker, and make about three shirts a day, at 2½*d.* a piece, every one of them having seven button-holes. I have to get up at six in the morning, and work till twelve at night to do that. I buy thread out of the price ; and I cannot always get work. I sometimes make trowsers: but I have not constant work with both put together. I sometimes make 2*s.* 6*d.* a week ; 3*s.* is the most I ever made ; and I

have to buy thread out of that. Three shirts a day takes $\frac{3}{4}d.$ for thread; that will be 18 farthings a week, or $4\frac{1}{2}d.$, say $6d.$ altogether. So that my regular wages are not more than $2s. 6d.$ or $2s.$, sometimes not more than $1s. 6d.$ I am now living with a young man. I am compelled to do so, because I could not support myself. I know he would marry me if he could. He is a looking-glass frame maker. He works for himself, and hawks them about. Sometimes he has not money enough to buy wood. He used to make more when I first lived with him than he does now. Sometimes he earns nothing. He has earned nothing for the last three weeks. If he had money I know he would marry me. Sometimes he is out all day, and does not get a farthing—not a bit to eat. Sometimes we have been for two days with a bit of dry bread and cold water. We both strive hard for work, that we do. I don't believe anybody can try harder to get work than we do."

Then an orphan told us her sufferings:—"I come from Edinburgh, in Scotland. I am the daughter of a publican. I was left an orphan at twelve years old, under the care of an uncle, my father's brother. Through my aunt and uncle's cruelty I left them at the age of fifteen or sixteen, with a young man. I lived with him for ten years, and had six children. I have one boy living now, at the age of eleven. Two years ago he deserted me. I did all I could to obtain a living in Edinburgh, and through persuasion I came to London about a twelvemonth ago. I was destitute of a home. I knew no one; but as long as I had anything to pledge or sell I paid for my lodging and maintenance. I then wandered about for days together, seeking food, till some girls I fell in with near the glass-house down here, told me of a gentleman of the name of —, and said if I would call upon him in the morning he would give me coffee and bread. I went to him for two or three mornings, and he gave me coffee and bread, and treated me very kindly. One day I saw a bill in a window in Rosemary-lane, wanting a girl to work at the needle. I went there, and got $2s.$ a week for three months; and I had to pay for my lodgings and find my food out of it. At last these people broke up their house, because they were not married, and they quarrelled. Then I had not a home to go to, being without work. I went back to the gentleman again; he wondered to see me, and asked me why I came back, and I told him. He was very kind to me, took me into his house, and gave me lodgings with

bread and coffee every morning. I was there for a week, till he found me work at the same place where I am in now. This was five months ago, and I am there now. If it had not been for that gentleman's kindness, I don't know what would have become of me, for I was without home or friends. I have not been on the town for these five months since I had work, but I was forced to do so before that. I state that solemnly, and I say it not for my own sake, but for the sake of others. I am not earning enough at the slop-work to keep me, but the person with whom I stop is very kind to me. I have paid her nothing for my lodgings, and she has given me many a meal of meat when I had not any. Could I obtain a living by my needle I would never resort to prostitution. I have got a situation to-day as a servant of all work. My boy is still living, I believe; but I have heard nothing of him this twelvemonth. He is in Scotland with his father. When his father deserted me he took the child—not at first; but I was not able to keep him, and so I sent him to his father. I do not wish to keep the child, because his father is able to keep him. I could not keep him in a proper manner. I should like to see my child sent to school, and brought up in the fear of God, and that is more than I am able to do, so that I would rather he stayed where he is. I think his father will be good to the child."

Then came another orphan girl. She had lately left the cholera hospital, and was ghastly pale:—"I was left an orphan, and got work as a trowsers maker, and I have been going on at that work for the last four years. I work for a warehouse. I have not got good health, nor have I been well for the last six years by means that I am scarcely able to maintain myself in food and clothing by my needle. I lived with a young man for eighteen months, but I am scarcely a fortnight out of the cholera hospital now, and I am so weak and feeble that I am not able to work for my living. My young man wishes us to get settled, but it is out of his power, by means of sickness, to make up the fees for our marriage. I did live with him. I don't live with him now. I parted with him only on account that he has no work, but we still meet and keep up our acquaintance, and are good friends. He cannot keep himself more than me. I still live by the trowsers making as far as I can, but I have not resorted to prostitution any further than with my young man. I still keep company with him, and we wish to get married.

Candidly and truthfully speaking I do not see any other person. I was brought up by my mother ; my father has been dead these six years. I pay for my lodging 1s. a week. Sometimes, when I was in health, I earned 4s. a week, but I have not earned more than 3s. 6d. altogether during the fortnight I have been out of the cholera hospital. My clothing and all is pledged, and I have not a thing to come out with."

This one had scarcely sat down before a woman with an infant in her arms stood up, and spoke as follows :—"I was left a widow with two children, and I could get no work to keep me. I picked up with this child's father, and thought with the little help that he could give me I might be able to keep my children ; but after all, I was forced by want and distress, and the trouble of child-bed, to sell all I had to get a bit of victuals. I was forced to go into the house at Wapping to be delivered of this child. This woman (pointing to a neighbour) took care of my other children. He (the father) came to me, gave me 5s., and told me that if I could take a room he would do all he could for me. I took a room at 1s. 6d. a week, and bought half a truss of straw ; and he told me he would marry me if ever it was in his power. I could not go out into the world again ; but this woman will tell you that all I have got under me and over me you may buy for 6d. I live with that man still, and sometimes I have not a bit to eat. I thought more of my little boy having a bit to eat than myself. He had been stealing some coals, and he is now imprisoned. I was forced to let him go to try to get a bit of victuals, for I had nothing more to make away with. My boy was taken up for stealing 3 lbs. of coals. He did not bring the coals to me ; he was taken before he could get home. I believe he stole them for my sake ; not to spend in any other way but to get a bit of bread and a bit of fire for his mother."

Another orphan then got up :—"I was left an orphan ten years ago," said she, "and took to needlework. I took to slop-shirts, but could not get a living by that, and so I took to the seaming of trowsers. Still I could not get a living, and by that means I lost what bit of furniture I had left. I could not pay my rent, and was in arrears three weeks. My landlord turned me out, and I had nowhere to go, till I was taken to a brothel by a person that I met, but I don't know who it was. I remained in that condition till such time as I fell in the family way, and the young man I fell in that state by went away and left me destitute. I was fourteen days

and fourteen nights and never saw a bed. It froze hard and snowed very fast, and I was exposed till it pleased God Almighty to send the person I live with now to help me. I am advanced in the family way at present. I am living with a man now, but not in a married state. It's not in his power to marry me, his work won't allow it; and he's not able to support me in the manner he wishes, and keep himself. He has never but two meals a-day—breakfast and supper. I think he would marry me if he had the marriage fees, willingly. It's not in my power to afford better clothing than I've got on. I hadn't a dinner to-day. I don't consider that I've tasted a Sunday's dinner for six months. I can't earn myself 4*d.* a day, and my partner's work don't amount to 1*s.* a day, taking one day with another. I've 1*s.* 6*d.* a week rent to pay out of that, and firing and food to find. Unless I was to go to other means, it wouldn't be in my power to do anything to support myself. I don't do it from inclination. I would leave it as soon as I could. I've been forced occasionally to resort to prostitution; but now I'm trying, by living on the small pittance I can get, to avoid it. I detest it: I was never reared to it. I was brought up to the Church and to attend to my God. I was always shown a different pattern; but misfortune overtook me. If I could get a living without it I would leave it."

The next speaker was the most eloquent of all. I never before listened to such a gush of words and emotion, and perhaps never shall again. She spoke without the least effort, in one continued strain, for upwards of half an hour, crying half hysterically herself, while those around her sobbed in sympathy:—"Between ten and eleven years ago I was left a widow with two young children, and far advanced in pregnancy with another. I had no means of getting a living, and therefore I thought I would take up slop-work. I got work at slop-shirts—what they call second-hand. I had no security, and therefore could not get the work myself from the warehouse. Two months before I was confined, I seemed to do middling well. I could manage three or four shirts—what they call 'rowers,' at 3*d.* each, by setting closely at work from five or six in the morning till about nine or ten at night; but, of course, when I was confined I was unable to do anything. As soon as I was able to sit up I undertook slop-shirts again; but my child being sickly, I was not able to earn so much as before. Perhaps I could earn 9*d.* a day by hard work, when I get 3*d.* each shirt; but sometimes I only get 2½*d.*,

and I have been obliged to do them at $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ each, and, with my child sickly, could only earn $4d.$, or at most $6d.$ a day. At other times I hadn't work. On the average I calculate that I have earnt $9d.$ a day when the prices were better. $1s. 9d.$ a week went for rent; and as to a living, I don't call it that; I was so reduced with it, and my child being so bad, it couldn't be considered a living. I was obliged to live on potatoes and salt; and for nine weeks together I lived on potatoes, and never knew what it was to have a half-quartern loaf—for the loaf was $9d.$ then. By that means my health was declining, and I wasn't able to do hard work. My child's health, too, was declining, and I was obliged to pawn the sheets of my bed and my blankets to procure a shilling. At last I found it impossible to pay my rent. I owed $7s.$ arrears, and my landlady plagued me much to pay her. She advised me to raffle away a large chest that I had; I did so, and gained $12s.$, and then paid her the $7s.$ I owed her; but I became so reduced again, that I was obliged to get an order to get into the 'house.' I didn't wish to go in, but I wanted relief and knew I couldn't get it without doing so. I felt it a hard trial to have my children taken from my bosom; we had never been parted before, and I can't help remembering what were my feelings then as a mother who always loved her children. I thought rather than we should be parted that I would make away with myself. But still I applied to the parish, and never shall I forget the day that I did so. I was told to go, and I would get a loaf by applying. I went in, and my heart was full at the thought of taking home a quartern loaf to my starving children. But I was disappointed; and seeing a loaf given out to other parties, I can say that I should have felt glad even of the crumbs to take home to my poor children if I could have got near enough. Christmas came round, and I thought, poor things, they will be without a Christmas dinner, and so I got an order to go into the Wapping workhouse. Yet my feelings were such that it was impossible I could enter, and I remained out five weeks after I had got the order, and pledged as far as I could, anything that would fetch $2d.$, obtaining also a little assistance from slop-work. But I got so little that I found it impossible to live. The time came to get another order, and I went with my clothes patched from top to bottom, yet I trust they were clean. And never shall I forget that Saturday afternoon as I travelled along Gravel-lane to the 'house,' with feelings that it was impossible for

me to enter, for I thought ‘How can I bear to have my dear children taken away from me—they have never been taken away from me before?’ I reflected, ‘What can I do but go there,’ so I mustered courage at all events to get to the gate; and, oh! it is impossible to describe what my feelings were as I passed through. I was admitted to a room where they were toasting the bread for the mistress’s tea. A little girl was there, and she said, ‘Look at these dear little children, I will give them a bit of the toast.’ The children took it, and thought it very nice, but they little thought that we were so soon to be parted. The first was seven years old, the second three, and the infant was in my arms. A mother’s feelings are better felt than described. The children were taken and separated, and then, oh my God! what I felt no tongue can tell. [Here the woman’s emotions overcame her, and she could not proceed with her narrative for weeping. At length recovering herself she continued]:—I was in hopes of getting my children back within a week or two, but my business could not be settled so soon. My babe took the measles; they went inwardly, and it took a deep decline. I knew it was very bad, and asked leave to go and see him. The mistress was very kind, and gave me leave. I found my child very bad, and the infant in my arms seemed declining every day. My feelings then were such as I can’t tell you. I thought—‘Oh! if I could only get out and have my children with myself, how much better it would be.’ I hurried them to settle my business for me; it originated in a dispute between St. George’s and Wapping about our parish, my husband being at the sugar-house at work. At last the dispute was settled, but the one child died, whilst the other, the youngest, was dying. I was so anxious to get out that I could not wait till my child was buried. I asked relief to be settled on me out of doors, and it was granted. I was allowed 1s. a week and two loaves. The acting master asked me if I had any place to go to. I said I would take a room. ‘Have you any bed,’ he asked. I said ‘yes, but no bedding.’ I was obliged to pledge it before I entered the house. He was a kind man, and said no doubt the overseers would get my blankets and bedding for me. ‘My dear woman,’ he said (for he saw I was an affectionate mother, and that I had nothing to begin with) ‘here is a shilling for you.’ He took it out of his own pocket, and I thought it very kind. The children were brought from Limehouse, and one of them was dead at the time. I went

with an anxious heart to see its corpse, but I felt 'I cannot stay with you till you are buried, because I have another nearly dead; but I will come again on Wednesday to see you buried.' Well, I found my poor boy but a shadow—a mere skeleton of what he had been. I was overcome with my feelings, and I thought 'Here is one dead, and another near death!' But I got up, and before ever I went to my room in Whitechapel I went to a doctor; but he said the boy was too far gone—that he wanted no medicine, but nourishing, for he was in a decline. I took him home, and said, 'One shilling a week and two loaves will not support us; there are three of us, and we cannot be supported by that, with this sickness. Well, I must take to slop-shirts again.' I did so. But I was not able to earn so much as I used to do. I sometimes did three a day at $2\frac{1}{2}d.$, sometimes three at $1\frac{1}{2}d.$, having needles and thread to find out of that. Half an ounce of coffee went us three times, and it had to be boiled up again, which made but a scanty meal with a few potatoes. However, I was very glad to put up with it. And then at last I found it impossible to get on; when a man lodging in the house was anxious to get a partner, and made offers to me. I thought it better to accept them than to do worse; and by his promising to be good to me, I did comply. Soon after, it pleased God to take my other boy from me; till at last I was in trouble again, and the result was that I was in the family way, and thought, 'Now what shall I do? My character is gone; it was good before, but now it is blemished.' The man did his part as well as he could, but the work he got was so little that he was not able to support us in a proper manner. We took a room together, and I am sorry to say some days he brought home nothing—other days, perhaps, no more than $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ or $3d.$, or a few halfpence that he might pick up for carrying a letter to the Post-office, or the like, for a gentleman. Some days, perhaps, he would earn $1s.$, and for the next three days again often not a farthing. And I earned so little myself, that, the times going on so bad, I did not know what to do. I told the man that he and I must part; for I had seen nothing but starvation with him. My time was up, and it pleased the Lord that I was delivered of twins, (here the poor creature seemed visibly affected with the multiplied distresses of the speaker,) and then my hands were full again. I looked at my babies, and there being two of them, felt that I could never support them, and I became delirious for hours.

The doctor, a kind-hearted man, said many a lady would be glad to have two such children as these. I said, God bless them, I shall have matches to sell with them to get them a bit of bread. Before I was able I was obliged to turn out. It was winter time, and I tried slop-shirts again to get a living, and was unable to earn 6*d.* a day. I got 10*s.* behind in my rent, my landlord threatened to take my sticks if I did not pay; and at last I went into the streets with matches. It was on a Saturday night, and I went to Shoreditch, thinking I would not be known, and fixed my position opposite the church, before a large china warehouse, kept by a man who, it was said, would not allow any one to stand before his door. I was determined to persevere till turned away, as nothing could be done without it, and my children must have bread. I was not turned away, because I think the man sympathised with me, and I stood that night till my own and my child's pockets were full with the pence we received. At eleven o'clock my child said her pocket string had broke, and she would lose her money if she did not go away. We therefore went home, and on counting our money we had got no less than 6*s.* 3*d.*, which we considered a good day's work. I said we would stop the lion's mouth with 3*s.*, and so I paid 3*s.* of my rent that night. We had a meat dinner on Sunday. it was ox's cheek, with a few potatoes, and that we considered a glorious dinner. Next Saturday night I went out again to Shoreditch, expecting as good success as before, but holding my head down like a bulrush, for fear that somebody would pass that knew me. I had not stood long before a female companion of my early days came up and observed me; she looked at me and said, 'Susan, in the name of goodness, is that you—and what has brought you here?' I said, 'Oh, Mary Ann, don't ask me, for I can't answer you—shame has brought me here.' She offered me 1*s.*, which I at first refused to take, as she was a poor woman herself; but she made me comply, saying she wished she could afford more. Well, I did not succeed so well as I had done before, because I only got 4*s.* altogether, including my friend's shilling, but I felt very well satisfied, as it was much better than slop-work. Well, one of my twins soon after died, and was buried by the parish. I had no parish relief then, for what I had done would make me be treated like a common prostitute, and I could not bear that. At last, one cold snowy Saturday night, I only obtained 9*d.*, and after that resolved

to go out no more. At last I consented, as the man wished me, to live with him again. But he earned very little, and I only got 2*d.* for what I had got 2½*d.* for before at slop-work, and 1¼*d.* for what used to be 1½*d.* Utterly distressed, I thought again of making away with my children. I locked the door, with the intention of taking their lives first and then my own, but God touched my conscience, and I could not do it. I kneeled down at the bed side and prayed God to hold my hand. I got up with a grateful heart, determined to trust in Providence. But I owed my landlord 12*s.*, and he threatened to take my things. He owed £12 of rent himself, however; and when the broker took my landlord's things, he took mine. I was turned into the street on New Year's-eve—that was five years ago—in a state of pregnancy, with my little twin and my little girl along with me. I stood there till eleven, and I thought of an old lady I knew who kept a kitchen at King-street, and sent the man I was living with to ask her to give me a night's shelter. She said, 'Yes, as long as I have a roof above my head I will give you refuge.' I was very thankful; but could not expect them to turn out of their bed to give it to us, so we lay upon the floor without taking off our clothes. At last the man and I got a garret for ourselves, and through the kindness of my friends and one of the gentlemen now present, I got a little furniture for it. I determined to separate from the man, being deeply impressed of the sin in which I was living. I was 8*s.* in debt at that time. I took to the trowsers again. My girl learned, and we got a warehouse. I was not very quick myself, and we could not earn enough to support us. I am confident we did not earn 3*s.* 6*d.* each on the average. We earnt 5*s.* and 6*s.* between us, and if we earnt 7*s.* by sitting up two nights a week, we felt that we had done a good week's work. A niece of mine came to me from Sheffield about this time, and set to work with us. The three of us could earn 10*s.* or 11*s.* a week between us by sitting up three nights a week. Coal, candle, and twist had to be found out of our earnings. My niece left us, being dissatisfied with her lot. I continued in that way, away from the man, for two years, and at last found it would not do. I got married two years ago, and have given up slop-work, and go out charing and washing. My daughter still continues at slop-work, however; but I am sure she could not live by it if she had nothing done for her, and depended on that alone. My firm belief, before God and man, is, that three

out of every four of the young women of London who do slop-work, are obliged to resort to private or public prostitution to enable them to live. But I hope better things are coming at last ; and God bless the gentlemen, I say, who have set this enquiry agoing to help the poor slopworkers, and I hope that public attention being now called to these matters, the oppressed will be oppressed no longer, and that the Parliament House even will interpose to protect them. But I am sorry to say the good are not always the powerful, nor the powerful always the good."

For a few minutes no one spoke. All were evidently pondering upon the tale they had just heard. At length a woman, with a half-clad, well-formed infant at her breast, arose. She said :—" I lived with the father of this child. He left me when within two months of my confinement. I had no home to go to, till an old lady stuck me down beside her, and gave me victuals and drink till I was taken to bed. I left her to go into the workhouse. I was confined in the street on my way there. When I was delivered in the street, it was a very stormy day—thunder and lightning, with snow and hail. The old lady would not let me be confined in her house, for fear of bringing trouble upon the parish. I was confined in the street ; an old woman brought out a blanket, and threw it over me and the baby. Mr. —— (the gentleman who was present) and his wife came over, found us clothing, paid the doctor, and gave me a shilling for a cab to go to St. George's workhouse. I came here to-night to thank that gentleman. I do nothing now to get a living, because I have no place to go to, or any friends to apply to for a character. I could work at making waistcoats, but I am quite a stranger here. The person I should work with at making waistcoats has left London. I am living now with a person down in Rosemary-lane. I have no means of living. I cannot get slop work. I used to sell things in the streets, but I cannot sell anything now, because I have no money. This child was born about two months ago. When I worked at the waistcoats, I used to make 8*d.* a day. I lived with a man then, but we were not married. I went with him because I could not get a situation, and I thought I had better do that than do worse."

The next speaker had an infant in her arms and a little girl by her side. She was evidently suffering acutely, both bodily and mentally :—" I have this infant at the breast and another child. I

lived with a young man eight or nine years. It is not in his power to make me his wife, because he has not the means to do so. I left him at different times, through sickness and distress, to go into the house. The last time I went in they were going to take the elder child from me and send it to Tooting, and another one that was suckling at my breast then ; but I have buried it since. The thought of having my children taken from me was more than I could bear, and I thought I would rather starve. I went before the board. One gentleman wished to assist me, but the others were all against me. He said what I had stated about having my children taken from me was quite right, and commended me for going out. I went out and lived with the father of the child again, and got a little work at trowsers and coat making. We both used to work as well as we could, him and me too. I fell in the family way again, and I lost my second child. We were so poor that we were forced to sell or part with anything that would fetch a penny to get food. Several times I went to the house, but they would not give me a loaf of bread for the children. I thought I would not go in—I would sooner do anything first. So we have gone on to the present time, and now I am working at the slops. I make coats, for which I get 6*d.* apiece, and it will take two days and a half to make one coat. Trowsers 3*d.* a pair, which has to be sown with double thread, and lined ; some I have made as low as 1*d.* a pair. I have parted with everything : I have not scarcely a bed to lie on, or a thing to cover us. Through lying in that state I have the rheumatism so bad that I scarcely know what to do with myself. I have been obliged to pledge my work to get food for us to eat. We have been two days and a half without tasting a bite ; the whole family, children and all, crying for food. I know it is a crime to live as I do, but I have been drove, compelled to do it. I did not expect to be able to come here. I expected a woman to take me up, and I think she will give me in charge to-morrow for pledging my work. [Here she burst into tears, and continued]—I don't know what to do ; my poor dear children will be taken away from me, and I am almost crazy. I have not a thing that will fetch a penny to get anything, and I have now no means of getting work. I have tasted nothing all day till I had a cup of tea down stairs." [Here the poor woman sat down with a fresh burst of tears.]

After this the following pathetic statement was made :—"I am a

tailoress, and I was brought to ruin by the foreman of the work, by whom I had a child. Whilst I could make an appearance I had work, but as soon as I was unable to do so I lost it. I had an afflicted mother to support, who was entirely dependent upon me. She had the *ticdouloureux* for three months, and was unable to do anything for herself; I went on so for some months, and we were half-starved, by means of my having so little work. I could only earn from 5s. to 6s. a week to support three of us. and out of that I had 1s. 6d. to pay for rent; and the trimmings to buy, which cost me 1s. a week full. I went on till I could go on no longer, and we were turned out into the street because we could not pay the rent—me and my child; but a friend took my mother. Everyone turned their back upon me—not a friend stretched out a hand to save me. For six weeks I never lay down in a bed; my child and me passed all that time in the streets. At last of all I met a young man, a tailor, and he offered to get me work for his own base purposes. I worked for him—worked for him till I was in the family way again. I worked till I was within two months of my confinement. I had 1s. a day, and I took a wretched kitchen at 1s. a week, and 2s. I had to pay to have my child minded when I went to work. My mother left her friend's and went into the house, but I took her out again, she was so wretched, and she thought she could mind the child. In this condition we were all starving together. No one would come near us who knew my disgrace, and so I resolved I would not be my mother's death, and I left her. She went to her friend's, but she was so excited at going that it caused her death, and she died an hour after she got into her friend's house. An inquest was held upon her, and the jury returned a verdict that she died through a horror of going into the workhouse. I was without a home. I worked till I was within two months of my confinement, and then I walked the streets for six weeks, with my child in my arms. At last I went into Wapping Union: my child was taken from me, and there [bursting into tears] he was murdered. I mean he was torn from me, and when I next saw him he was a mere shadow. I took my discharge, and took him out, dying as he was. I took one in my arms, and my boy, dying as he was, and we wandered the streets for two or three days and nights. I then went back to the house. The matron said she would not take my child from me. She said he was dying, and he should die beside me. He

died eleven days after we went in. I took my discharge again. I tried again to get a living, but I found it impossible, for I had no home, no friends, no means to get work. I then went in again, and the Lord took away my second child. I came out again, and went into a situation. I remained in that situation fourteen months, when I was offered some work by a friend, and I have been at that work ever since. I have a hard living, and I earn from 4*s.* 6*d.* to 5*s.* a week. My children and mother are both dead. The tailor never did anything for me. I worked for him and had 1*s.* a day. I never had one to stretch out a hand to save me, or I never should have had a second fall. From seven in the morning till one or two o'clock I work at making waistcoats and coats. I have 5*d.* apiece for double-breasted waistcoats, and 10*d.* and 11*d.* apiece for slop coats. I can assure you I can't get clothes or things to keep me in health. I never resorted to the streets since I had the second child."

Then came the last confession of all :—"I have three children to support; the eldest is thirteen years of age. I have no husband. The father of the children left me when I was seven months gone with the third child. He gave me 1*s.* the night he went away—that was on the 17th of March, and the child was born on the 1st of April. I have never heard of nor seen him since. I had a comfortable room of goods then, and I did not owe a farthing; but I have had to part with everything that would fetch a pennypiece since. My little girl will be fourteen on the 9th of next January; and last week I got her a situation at 9*d.* a week and her victuals, at a hat maker's; but her shoes are so bad that I am afraid she will be sent home by the lady, and I have no money to get her a better pair. I make trowsers at 3*d.* a pair, duck frocks at 2*d.*, duck trowsers at 1½*d.* a pair, and find thread. They have one pocket, six button-holes, and ten buttons. The trowsers at 3*d.* a pair are lined, with two pockets, and sewed with double thread. If I sit from five in the morning till ten at night, I can only earn 9*d.* a day, and I am not able to pay any one to take care of the children. I sit up two or three nights a week, and I work on Sundays—I am ashamed to say it—as well. I never know the taste of a bit of meat from one month's end to the other. If I have a cup of tea and a halfpenny herring for the children, I am thankful. I have a kitchen, for which I pay a rent of 1*s.* a week. I have a

small bed, and one patchwork counterpane to cover me and the children." [Here the poor woman burst into tears, and was unable to proceed further.]

After having made these statements, they were asked what were their lowest earnings last week, when it appeared that four had earned 1s., four under 1s. 6d., four under 2s., one under 2s. 6d. One woman said 3s. 6d. had been earned between two of them, another said she had earned 3s. 6d., while a third declared she had not earned anything. Three said they had parted with their work for food. It was the unanimous declaration of the whole present, that if the meeting had been more generally known several hundreds would have attended, who would conscientiously have made the same declaration they had done—that they were forced into a wrong course of life by the lowness of their wages.

In answer to a question whether any had other clothes than what they appeared in, the very idea of a change of garments appeared to excite a smile. One and all declared they had not, and most asserted that even those they wore were not their own. One said, "This bonnet belongs to another woman;" another said, "This shawl belongs to my neighbour;" another said, "I have no frock, because I had to leave it in pawn for 6d.;" another said, "I have been forced to sit up this afternoon and put many a patch on this old frock, for the purpose of making my appearance here this evening;" another said, "The gown I have got on does not belong to myself;" while still another added, "I had to take the petticoat off my child, for 6d. to get victuals last Sunday morning."

Whilst the meeting above reported was taking place, a large number, hearing that the female slopworkers had been requested to assemble, had congregated in the room below, and we immediately descended to take the statistics of the earnings and conditions of those who had collected there. At this meeting there were 62 females present. Of these, 3 were under the age of 20; 13 were between 20 and 30; 19 were between 30 and 40; 13 were between 40 and 50; 10 were between 50 and 60; and 3 between 70 and 80. Of these, 30 were married; 23 were widows; 9 were single. There were 8 widows with 1 child; 4 with 2 children; and 2 with 3. There were 5 married women with 1 child; 4 with 2, 6 with 3, 1 with 4, 3 with 5, and 1 with 7 children. Twenty-two worked first-handed, and 32 second; none appeared to work at third

hand. Four were living at the houses of "sweaters," having tea and lodgings found them. The earnings of last week were—21 below 1s.; 7 below 1s. 6d.; 6 below 2s.; 5 below 2s. 6d.; 10 below 3s.; 1 below 3s. 6d.; 1 below 4s.; 2 below 5s.—below 6s. none; and the enquiry as to whether there were any who earned 7s. present was thought so absurd, that it was received with shouts of laughter.

They all agreed that they must work hard, and sit up till twelve or one at night, to make from 6d. to 9d. a day clear; and that, taking one week's earnings with another, 1s. 6d. a week might be the average earnings throughout the year. That they were several months in the year without work was the unanimous declaration. Opinions seemed to be equally divided whether for four or six months.

There were present 23 shirt makers, one of whom made shirts at $\frac{3}{4}$ d. apiece, and found cotton. The other prices and number of individuals present were—at 1d., 4; $1\frac{1}{4}$ d., 10; $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 10; 2d., 13; $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 9; 3d., 6; $3\frac{1}{2}$ d., 6; 4d., 2; $4\frac{1}{2}$ d., 2; 5d., none; 6d., answered by great laughter.

Of trowsers makers there were 11. The prices at which they worked were—2 for $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pair, 7 at 2d., 5 at 3d., 3 at 4d., 4 at 5d., 7 at 6d., 1 at 8d., and 1 at 10d.—all finding trimmings, at 1d. per pair.

There were a few makers of waistcoats, who said the prices averaged from $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 7d., the latter price being paid for satin ones [laughter]. It was also stated that blouses were made from $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 5d., finding trimmings. Jackets, of which a woman produced one as a pattern, were $2\frac{3}{4}$ d.; two could be made in a day, and the trimmings would cost $\frac{1}{4}$ d. This woman worked first-hand.

There were 17 coat hands. The prices and number of hands present were—3 for 5d. a coat, some got 6d. and 8d. One woman said she had got as high as 1s. 9d.; but the ordinary price was from 10d. to 1s., and those lined all through. Tweeds, fustians, moleskins, and pilots were from 1s. to 1s. 3d., heavy lined work. A shilling coat would cost from $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 2d. for trimmings.

An attempt was made to ascertain from those present how many might be engaged in slop-working. One shop, it was stated, employed from 500 to 600 hands, another about 150, another from 300 to 400, another 1,000, another 40 to 50, another 500, another 300,

another 600, another 50, another 80, another 50, another 1,000, another 600, another 250, another 40, another 100, another 300, another 25 ; being altogether, on a rough estimate, from 6,000 to 7,000 persons employed in this wretched mode of subsistence.

The question how many had meat every day for dinner seemed to these poor creatures an exquisite joke, and they laughed heartily on its being put. Four had meat three days a week, and 29 on Sundays, the parties stating, at the same time, that they were indebted for this to their husbands, none got it by their own labour ; they could hardly get a cup of tea.

Another question that greatly excited their merriment was how many had been obliged to go to the pawnshop, as it was found that nearly every one of them was familiar with that refuge for the unfortunate. Four of them had goods pledged to the extent of £4, 2 to the value of £3, 11 of £2, 13 of £1, 7 of 10s., 4 of 5s., and 14 had goods in pawn under 5s. value ; 13 widows and single women had parted with their beds, and 26 had parted with their under-clothing. These facts were received with such signs of astonishment that it was evident even those assembled were not aware of the destitution of the workwomen.

Of the earnings of the husbands of the married women, it appeared that 1 earned under 15s. last week ; 19 earned under 10s. ; 6 earned under 5s. ; 3 under 4s. ; 1 under 2s. ; 3 under 1s. ; while 6 had earned nothing whatever. Of these last, the women told piteous tales. One had been paralyzed seven months ; 2 were dock labourers, but had earned nothing for weeks ; another, a plasterer, had been out of work for twelve weeks ; while another could get no work since February last.

There were 3 who paid under 1s. for their lodgings ; 19 who paid under 1s. 6d. ; 18 under 2s. ; 10 under 2s. 6d. ; 1 under 3s. ; 3 under 3s. 6d.

Ten had been forced to go into the workhouse ; 19 had been forced to pawn their work ; 31 had been without food for a whole day through ; 5 had fasted for a day and a half ; while no fewer than 7 had been obliged to go without food for the period of two days. Yet, with one single exception, none of these women would admit that they had ever had recourse to prostitution. Three had been driven to beg in the streets ; one said she had often been very near taking to prostitution, but never did. They were, how-

ever, unanimous in declaring that a large number in the trade—probably one-fourth of the whole, or one-half of those who had no husband or parent to support them—resorted to the streets to eke out a living. Accordingly, assuming the Government returns to be correct, and that there are upwards of 11,000 females under twenty living by needle and slop-work, the numerical amount of prostitution becomes awful to contemplate. One woman stated that all those who appeared with good clothes might be taken to resort to that mode of life; but she added, certainly with great truth, “you see there are none of that kind here.”

This closed the meeting.

From the “Morning Chronicle,” December 1849.

“There is no word in the English language,” says a great English divine, “which expressed more abominable wickedness than *Oppression*.” All the *generous* and *right feeling* part of mankind will heartily respond to this sentiment. * * * No longer daring to take open violence for its minister, it finds equally effective auxiliaries in cupidity and fraud. True it is no longer able to slay, to imprison, or to plunder, with the strong hand—for the law will repress such *overt* violations of civil rights. But it can render existence a sore burden; it can drain the sources of life by slow starvation; and it can wear out, by ceaseless toil and intolerable thralldom, the wretched beings whom it has made its *slaves*. Yes, it is too true that in the light of the nineteenth century, under the shelter of British law, and in the very metropolis of civil freedom, oppression at which the heart turns sick, is still practised on a great scale—oppression not the less cruel or atrocious, because it is exhibited in its meanest and most grovelling form.”

And is not all this oppression committed by Her Majesty’s Ministers? by Bishops and Clergy? by Magistrates? by the Committees of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and Religious Tract Society? yea, by those who are specially appointed as, and called, the Guardians of the Poor? and ought not all these, and are they not all placed by Providence, to be their Guardians? I affectionately urge upon them all, well

to consider their awful state before God. They are answerable for those they employ; they are the instigators, the encouragers of all this oppression: it would not exist a day if they were aware of their responsibilities.

Eugene Sue:—

“Upon society (I say upon the Government) will rest the terrible responsibility of these sad deaths; so long as thousands of human creatures, unable to live upon the mockery of wages granted to their labour, have to choose between these three gulfs of shame and woe:—

“A life of enervating toil and mortal privations—the cause of a premature death.

“Prostitution, which kills also, but slowly—by contempt, brutality, and uncleanness.

“Suicide, which kills at once.”

It has been stated by the Female Emigration Committee that these poor needlewomen are not a class that can be generally emigrated; further, I believe it is now acknowledged that emigration would not be a cure for the grievous condition of our poor neighbours, and, I trust, many of them sisters in the Lord. Then are they to remain in their present most cruelly oppressed condition? Surely not. Is not their oppressed state a disgrace to our Queen? a disgrace to our Government? a disgrace to our Legislature? a disgrace to our Church, Archbishops, Bishops, and Clergy? and to all denominations of the professors of Christ's religion? All may assist to alleviate their cruel misery. All are personally interested in doing so—independent of our duty towards our God and country. I affectionately appeal for the aid of all my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen, commending all to the mercy of our covenant God, in Christ Jesus.

WM. SHAW.

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